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## **WSDA receives grant to support marketing efforts of pear and wine grape growers**

OLYMPIA — The state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) received a grant of nearly \$47,000 this month from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP). Of that, \$15,000 will be used to increase consumption and sales of fresh pears. The rest will be used to increase awareness of and demand for Yakima Valley wine grapes.

**PEARS:** WSDA will contract with Pear Bureau Northwest to evaluate consumer acceptance of the "pear packer," a reusable plastic container that protects a ready-to-eat pear from being damaged. Although fresh fruit is an ideal option for a snack, it doesn't seem to be a top pick for mobile consumers. Pears and other fresh fruit must compete in the marketplace with high-calorie prepackaged foods that appeal to today's fast-paced on-the-go consumers. Fast food restaurants, snacks and candy monopolize the market for convenience in the food industry.

"Before the pear packer can be fully launched, research is needed to discover why consumers resist packing fresh fruit into lunches," said Meg VanSchoorl, senior international trade specialist at WSDA. "Pears and other soft fruits face an extra challenge because they're easily damaged when transported in backpacks or briefcases."

"We believe the pear packer will help overcome consumer reluctance to more often consider fresh fruit as an on-the-go food choice," says Kevin Moffitt, president and CEO of Pear Bureau Northwest. "The results of the study will help us promote ripe, juicy fresh pears, carried in a pear packer, as a convenience food that is also healthy and delicious."

**WINE GRAPES:** WSDA will contract with Appellation Yakima Valley (AYV) to develop a Web site, brochure and map as part of a marketing program for AYV wine grapes. Although the area has the state's oldest vineyards and represents 40 percent of the grape acreage, many of the grapes are grown on a small scale. These farms lack the resources to develop marketing plans. The program will help the growers compete in today's challenging marketplace.

"A primary focus of the marketing program is to show the consistency and dependable quality, year in and year out, of Yakima Valley wine grapes, which have been made into world-class wines by wineries throughout the state," says VanSchoorl. "The plan will target not only opinion leaders, such as retailers, consumers, media,

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distributors and wine shop owners, but also high population, high growth areas on the west side of the state where most of the wine is consumed.”

USDA’s FSMIP grants support the development of new market opportunities for the nation’s food and agricultural products. The program encourages research and innovations to improve the efficiency and performance of the agricultural marketing system.

USDA awarded a total of \$1.3 million in grants this year to 20 states and America Samoa. The grants will support agricultural market research and demonstration projects for a wide spectrum of commodities and address a number of important marketing issues. These include developing new markets, direct marketing, evaluating consumer preferences, export opportunities, economic analysis, transportation, distribution and improving producer’s business skills to help them succeed in the market.

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